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AUTHOR Wenzel, Joseph W.
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ABSTRACT

The author of this paper contends that argumentation can provide the rational framework for a "rhetoric of value evolution," that the study of value-centered argument can clarify the logical and epistemological status of value claims and the reasons supporting them. Stephen Toulmin's solution to the traditional problems concerning the justification of values is reviewed, and a broad outline of an approach that might be taken to advance understanding of the value argument is sketched. (RB)

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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARGUMENTATION
TO A RHETORIC OF VALUES

Joseph W. Wenzel
University of Illinois

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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARGUMENTATION
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Most campuses seem to be fairly peaceful places nowadays. But all of us can remember the troubled times in the sixties, when radical students made non-negotiable demands and college administrators took adamant positions. I imagine we all shared the feeling in those days that rational dialogue had failed. Perhaps we felt that failure most keenly when the parties to a dispute agreed on the facts of a situation, but still found themselves at odds. Often, then, we heard some such statement as this: "Well, we have a difference of values here. So there's no point in talking anymore!" The implicit assumption--of both radicals and conservatives--was that value conflicts cannot be resolved by rational discussion, that values are so personal, so purely subjective that they cannot be supported or justified except by throwing oneself on the barricades.

Wayne Booth explored that problem in a series of lectures at Notre Dame University in 1971, subsequently published under the title Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent.¹ He attributed the failure of dialogue to a set of ideas he calls the dogmas of modernism.² Booth describes the central notion this way:

What is most interesting here is the automatic reliance on the distinction between facts and values, and the quality of the reply one often receives if he questions that distinction. If the word dogma is applicable to any general notion that cannot, for the believer, be brought into question, the belief that you cannot and indeed should not allow your values to intrude upon your cognitive life--that thought and knowledge and fact are on one side and affirmations of value on the other--has been until recently a dogma for all right-thinking moderns.³

The acceptance of this central dichotomy has inevitably led to the choosing of sides. On the one hand, one may choose the camp that Booth calls "scientismists," the positivists who put the highest value (irony intended) on science, reason, and knowledge grounded in empirical fact. On the other side are those "irrationalists" who simply "leapt blindly for the value side" of the dichotomy, and who "feel free to assert any value that 'feels' right."⁴ Ironically, this crucial philosophical assumption, on which they did agree, retarded efforts to reach agreement on substantive issues.

The problem I have described so far may be called a failure of confidence. As Booth says, "we have lost our faith in the very possibility of finding a rational path through any thicket that includes what we call value judgments."⁵ A second aspect of the problem, which follows from the first, may be called a failure of method. Having accepted the assumption that values are somehow non-rational, we have failed to develop methods of analysis and justification for coping with value disputes. Many of us have felt rather helpless in the face of powerful arguments by positivist philosophers. We have had no answer to those like Charles Stevenson, for example, when he argues that, to the extent that a value dispute is based on differences in belief about the facts, it can be resolved logically; to the extent that such a dispute involves disagreement in "attitudes," i.e. evaluations, it cannot be resolved rationally, and one merely has recourse to "persuasion"--a term he uses to denote any form of irrational exhortation.⁶

Writers on rhetoric have been somewhat more willing than many others to deal with the problem in a practical way. Surely, when one attends to practical discourse, it is impossible to ignore the pervasiveness of value premises. And so in recent years several writers on rhetoric have taken

steps, at least tentatively, toward the sort of analysis that I am sketching here. Booth's book is a major contribution in clearing away some misconceptions arising from the dichotomy of fact and value.⁷ Steele and Redding have clarified the American value system for students of public address.⁸ Gerald Miller urged teachers and scholars in argumentation and debate to experiment with propositions of fact and value and suggested some bases for arguing them.⁹ Bruce Gronbeck surveyed several philosophers' approaches to the logic of value argument and related them to the responsibilities of advocates.¹⁰ Recent articles in Philosophy and Rhetoric have attempted to join the interests of philosophers and rhetoricians on value centered discourse.¹¹ Karl Wallace devoted much time in his last years to elucidating the theory of good reasons as the substance of discourse.¹² The New Rhetoric of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, though it does not develop an analysis of value statements per se, deals implicitly and explicitly with value argument throughout.¹³

In Philosophy and Rhetoric, Robert Scott recently argued for an intersubjective set toward reality as the most appropriate underpinning for an enlarged conception of rhetoric. Such an epistemological view, he claims, helps us to appreciate "the irreducible modicum of human valuing in every human action."¹⁴ After characterizing the levels on which we sense rhetoric as the strategic, the substantial, and the dynamic, Scott observes:

We may find it helpful to think of the second and third senses of rhetoric as forming together a new rhetoric of value-evolution. Undoubtedly there has always been rhetoric of this sort, but the traditional theories did not tend to focus on it. An enlarged concept of rhetoric is necessary if we are to comprehend the substantial and dynamic senses in which rhetoric functions to

generate continuous validation of ways in which communities act together.¹⁵

Now the "ways in which communities act together" are defined by the shared values that bind their members. It is in that sense that Karl Wallace called values "the ultimate substance of discourse."¹⁶

My thesis in this paper is that argumentation can provide the rational framework for a "rhetoric of value evolution," that the study of value-centered argument can clarify the logical and epistemological status of value claims and the reasons supporting them. I will, first, review one philosopher's solution to the traditional problems concerning the justification of values, and secondly, sketch the broad outline of an approach we might take to advance our understanding of value argument.

I

It seems odd that, for all the use we have made of Stephen Toulmin's Uses of Argument,¹⁷ there are so few references in our literature to his equally important book, An Examination of The Place of Reason in Ethics.¹⁸ In that book, Toulmin skillfully clears away much of the philosophical underbrush that has impeded both philosophers and rhetoricians in seeking to bridge the so-called "is-ought gap." I can think of no better place to begin than the passage Toulmin quotes from Sophocles:

Of all the many wonders, none is more wonderful than Man . . .
who has learnt the arts of Speech, of wind-swift Thought, and
of living in Neighbourliness ¹⁹

The idea of community, of "living in Neighbourliness," undergirds Toulmin's account of the place of reason in ethical discourse. The fact of human community, of duty, of the recognition of mutual obligation, is what gives sig-

nificance to the class of value statements that we call ethical. For such statements function rationally to harmonize the interests of members of a community. On that view, it is clearly a mistake either (1) to seek to justify values on the same epistemological basis on which we justify factual statements, or (2) to suppose, because value statements cannot be justified in the same manner as factual statements, that they are in some way epistemologically inferior. Yet, just such mistakes have led many philosophers to raise imaginary difficulties over the justification of values.

Toulmin examines three positions in philosophical ethics which are founded on the mistaken assumptions alluded to, and which have exacerbated the problem of the "is-ought gap." The first is the "objectivist" approach which treats "goodness," "rightness," and all such ethical terms as references to properties of the thing evaluated.²⁰ One comes to know these peculiar properties through some sort of "moral sense," just as one comes to know certain physical properties through the senses of sight and touch, etc. But the objectivist approach leads us to such difficulties as the following. If I say, for instance, that this paper is good, and you reply that it is bad, one of us must have misperceived the inherent property of the paper. One of us must be right, and the other wrong, in the same sense that one of us would be right and the other wrong if one asserted that the paper is white and the other that it is green. In short, because the objectivists cannot explain ethical disagreement rationally, they can give no account of what is to count as a good reason for an ethical claim. As Toulmin concludes:

The objective doctrine is, therefore, not just unhelpful to us: it is a positive hindrance, diverting on to arguments

about a purely imaginary 'property' the attention which should be paid to the question of ethical reasoning.²¹

The second position Toulmin examines is the subjectivist approach which "puts forward the doctrine that, in saying that anything is good or right, we are reporting on the feelings which we (or the members of our social group) have towards it."²² This approach is a sort of mirror-image of the former, objectivist approach. For, whereas the objectivist cannot account for rational disagreement over value judgments, the subjectivist cannot account for rational agreement. In the dispute over the quality of this paper, on the objectivist view, one of us must be right and the other wrong; on the subjectivist view, neither of us can be right or wrong, for we are merely reporting our purely personal reactions. Our judgments refer to our internal states of mind, merely, and there are no independent standards to which we can appeal. Thus, as Toulmin concludes, "no subjective theory can give any account of what is a good reason for an ethical judgment, or provide any standard for criticising ethical reasoning."²³

A third position in meta-ethical theory is the "imperative" approach, a more recent and more sophisticated variant of the subjective doctrine.²⁴ According to this school, ethical statements merely evince our feelings, and have no more logical force than exclamations of approval or disapproval. For the imperativist, "'truth,' 'falsity' and 'proof' or 'verification' are features of logical, mathematical and factual statements only, and strict proof or factual verification the only kind of good reason which can be said to support any statements."²⁵ With the domain of reason thus limited--by definition--to the analytic and empirical, it follows that we can never

support a value statement rationally. All we can hope to do is command, cajole, or exhort.

Three things may be said of these meta-ethical theories. First, none gives an adequate answer to the question Toulmin takes as central: what sort of argument shall we accept as providing good reason for a value claim? Secondly, their weaknesses spring from the modernist dogma that Booth attacks, the dichotomizing of fact and value with the concomitant alignment of reason with the former. Third, they invoke another false dichotomy between the objective and subjective as the locus of values. But of course values are neither in the object, nor in the subject merely. Rather, values exist in an intersubjective realm of agreements that are the fabric of a community; they exist in the actions and discourse of persons constructing, sustaining, testing and revising the rules by which they will live and act together. Nor is the dichotomy of fact and value tenable when it subsumes the tacit dichotomy of rational and irrational. For practical men and women will persist in expressing "reasons" for their moral judgments, despite the chorus of positivist philosophers who cry "mere rhetoric!" (and thus, by their own account, only evince their attitudes without reasons!).

On what foundation, then, can we build a rationale of value argument? Toulmin urges that we recognize the function of ethics as different from, but not inferior to, the function of science. The function of our most disciplined empirical language, i.e. scientific discourse, is "to correlate our experiences in such a way that we know what to expect."²⁶ The function of ethical discourse is "to correlate our feelings and behavior in such a way as to make the fulfillment of everyone's aims and desires as far as

possible compatible."²⁷ Or in other words:

. . . ethics and ethical language can be regarded as part of the process whereby, as members of a community, we moderate our impulses and adjust our demands so as to reconcile them as far as possible with those of our fellows.²⁸

Thus, statements of the general form, "This practice would involve the least conflict of interests attainable," or "This practice will promote the general welfare," function as perfectly good reasons for ethical claims like "This is the right practice."²⁹ And, thus, the "is-ought gap" is bridged in the common-sensical way that men have bridged it since they began discussing their practical affairs. And arguments are validated, not by recourse to scientific procedures or analytic logic, but by the experience of the social group in question.³⁰ Thus, it makes as much sense to say of a child, "He doesn't know the difference between right and wrong," (implying that he lacks sufficient social experience), as it does to say of an adult, "He doesn't know the mating habits of the African wart-hog," (implying that he lacks sufficient experience of observation). In both cases, there is a straightforward, rational sense of what it means to "know" something. The force of the term is the same in each case; the criteria for judgment differ because the two statements differ in their functions.³¹

This review of Toulmin's position is cursory, indeed, but perhaps it will suffice to suggest the general considerations that may restore our confidence in inquiring further into the logic of value argument. If we resolve to seek the rationale of value discourse in its own realm, we will not be led to misjudge value arguments because they do not conform to irrelevant standards. Toulmin helps us to understand the realm of ethical statements,

specifically, and of course there are other types of value statements which we have not yet accounted for. But Toulmin's work can stand at least as an illustration of the general principle that a rational basis can be found for every sort of value discourse that has real significance for people, whether it be ethical, aesthetic, or some other. If we attend to the function that each sort of value statement serves, we will find there a general indication of what is to count as a good reason, and an opportunity to develop a more refined set of standards. We may now say more about how that development might proceed.

II

My second object in this paper is to sketch the broad outlines along which we need to develop an understanding of value argument. We should, I believe, aim to develop an extensive understanding of distinct types of value judgments or claims, and an intensive analysis of the patterns of argument related to each type.

The first requirement of the extensive study is to discover or devise a classification of value statements that will help us to exhibit the forms and substance of arguments relevant to each type. The treatments in the literature of argumentation and of philosophy range from excessively simple to overly complex. Textbooks on argumentation and debate have not been especially helpful in this respect; typically, they just advise the debater to seek appropriate criteria and apply them.³² One philosophical work lists nine features according to which value statements can be classified, including eight "points of view" or "realms of value" basic to all civilized cultures.³³ Eventually, we may want to achieve such elaboration, but as a starting point I want to offer a more basic set of categories.

Table 1 presents a scheme of classification that I have been using for a few years to teach a differential analysis of value statements. I was led to this approach by Nowell-Smith's analysis of the different functions that value terms perform in different contexts.³⁴ Although by now my classification differs from his, the underlying principles remain the same: that value statements are used to express different things in different contexts; that we can discover their "meaning" only by exploring each context, including the speaker's intention; and that such a determination of meaning (or function) is necessary to enable us to identify the relevant grounds for argument about the statement. Thus, my scheme, first recognizes that some value statements serve as relatively trivial expressions of subjective feelings, while others are consequential and important; second, it identifies what I take to be fundamental types of judgment that our evaluations express; and third, the scheme suggests, in a general way, what would constitute good reasons for each type of judgment.

TABLE 1

A TENTATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF VALUE STATEMENTS

Sample statement: "Exercise is good."

Trivial expressions	POSSIBLE MEANING	CLASS	CHARACTERISTIC REAIM OF DISCOURSE	RELEVANT LINES OF ARGUMENT
	"I enjoy it."	Subjective expression	Small talk	
Consequential	"It is a pleasurable experience."	Appreciative judgment	Aesthetics	Choice of criteria (and) Application of criteria
	"It is one's duty to keep physically fit."	Moral judgment	Ethics	Application of a moral rule (or) Weighing consequences of acts (or) Weighing consequences of rules
	"It will contribute to good health."	Instrumental judgment	Politics	Justification of ends (and) Establishing efficacy of means

Whether or not these categories withstand further investigation, they appear to be reasonable starting points. They represent the categories that I have encountered most often in the works of philosophers. Karl Wallace reached the same sort of conclusion from his study of ethics and value theory, for he sets out a system of value topoi under the headings: "the commendable" (appreciative), "the obligatory" (moral), and "the desirable" (instrumental).³⁵ A recent study by Hample and Wenzel suggests (though not unequivocally) that the categories have some validity even for persons untrained in ethics and value theory.³⁶ Finally, the most persuasive evidence I have for the utility of the system is the experience of my students in argumentation classes. They have been able to understand the categories, construe value statements in terms of them, comprehend (and even tolerate) varying interpretations of the same statement in different contexts, and discuss clearly the rational bases for justifying each type. They can, it turns out, be weaned from the dogmas of modernism.

Certainly the categories--aesthetic, moral, political--are familiar areas in which we are used to finding value judgments, and in each area there exists extensive literature by specialists that would help us to refine our criteria for judging arguments. And that should be our next task, the intensive study of each class of value propositions to discover its unique characteristics and the criteria appropriate to assess arguments therein. In order to illustrate the kind of analysis that is possible here, I will draw again on Toulmin's Reason in Ethics in which he posits three patterns of moral argument.³⁷ (The lines of argument relevant to moral judgments in Table 1 correlate with the three patterns.)

The first case is the classic situation in which a moral question is

answered by applying an appropriate rule or principle. Given certain factual conditions (E), a rule (W) applies to yield a decision (C). (See Figure 1.) If the rule is not understood or not accepted, it can be explained or supported by reference to the experience of the social group in question (B). Naturally the argument is open to appropriate reservations and qualifications.

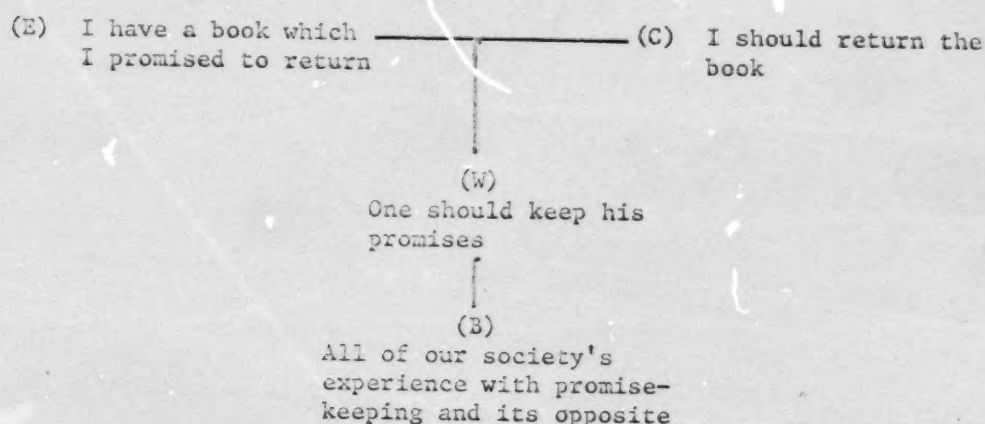


Figure 1

The second pattern of moral reasoning arises from the inevitable conflicts of duty in a complex world. Suppose that, in the same situation outlined in Figure 1, I have also been charged with the responsibility for caring for an invalid relative who cannot safely be left alone. With that complication added to the factual circumstances (E), a second moral rule (W) comes into play, having to do with discharging one's responsibility to an ill or infirm relative. The question then becomes, not which rule is better, for both may be perfectly sound rules, but rather which course of action is likely to produce the least harm (or greatest benefits). One thus proceeds to weigh the consequences of particular acts in order to reach a decision.

A third pattern of moral reasoning arises when a rule or principle is subjected to criticism in the abstract. So, for example, when a modern young couple who have been living together without civil or religious sanction say to their parents, "Marriage just isn't necessary any more," they call into question (presumably) a moral principle of long standing in their society. The question to be decided is not merely the concrete one about what they should do. The form of their statement focuses clearly on the soundness of the rule as a rule. Appropriate arguments will thus focus on the past experience of their society in following the rule, and on the foreseeable consequences of continuing to follow it or of adopting some alternative. In other words, they weigh the consequences of rules in general in order to choose rationally between alternatives.

This analysis has brought us a long way from the simple treatment of most textbooks.³⁸ It should be clear by now that an extensive analysis of different sorts of value statements and an intensive analysis of each type will put us more surely in touch with the actual rationales of value-centered discourse in many contexts. The field of argumentation has much to gain from this undertaking, chiefly by expanding and refining our rational strategies for encompassing value conflicts. In a larger sense, we will be developing the logical framework for a rhetoric of value evolution. In Chaim Perelman's words, "The theory of argumentation will help to develop what a logic of value judgments has tried in vain to provide, namely the justification of the possibility of a human community" ³⁹

NOTES

- ¹Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1974. Paper edition, U. of Chicago Press, 1974.
- ²Ibid., p. 22 et passim.
- ³Ibid., p. 13.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 7.
- ⁶Charles L. Stevenson, Ethics and Language (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1944), p. 138.
- ⁷Another interesting work that addresses the same problem is currently enjoying some popularity on college campuses: Robert M. Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (NY: Bantam Books, 1975).
- ⁸Edward D. Steele and W. Charles Redding, "The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion," Western Speech Journal, 26 (Spring, 1962), 83-91.
- ⁹Gerald R. Miller, "Questions of Fact and Value: Another Look," Southern Speech Journal, 28 (Winter 1962), 115-122.
- ¹⁰Bruce Gronbeck, "From 'Is' to 'Ought': Alternative Strategies," Central States Speech Journal, 19 (Spring 1968), 31-39.
- ¹¹For example, Hugh G. Petrie, "Practical Reasoning: Some Examples," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 4 (Winter 1971), 29-41; John Hardwig, "The Achievement of Moral Rationality," Ibid., 6 (Summer 1973), 171-185.
- ¹²See especially, "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons," QJS, 49 (October 1963), 239-249; "Topoi and the Problem of Invention," QJS, 58 (December 1972), 387-395.
- ¹³Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (Notre Dame: Notre Dame U. Press, 1969).
- ¹⁴Robert L. Scott, "On Not Defining 'Rhetoric'," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 6 (Spring 1973), 88.

- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 94.
- ¹⁶ Karl R. Wallace, "The Primacy of Substance and Ideas in the Teaching of Practical Discourse," The English Journal, 53 (1964), 3.
- ¹⁷ Cambridge: The University Press, 1958. Paper edition, 1964.
- ¹⁸ Cambridge: The University Press, 1950. Paper edition, 1960.
- ¹⁹ Sophocles, Antigone.
- ²⁰ Reason in Ethics, ch. 2.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 28.
- ²² Ibid., p. 29, and the whole of ch. 3.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid., ch. 4.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 54.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 125. The point is developed in chapters 7 and 8.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 137.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 132.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 224.
- ³⁰ See also, Wallace, "The Substance of Rhetoric," p. 248.
- ³¹ The notions of force and criteria are, of course, from Toulmin, The Uses of Argument, esp. pp. 29-35.
- ³² For example, Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, Decision by Debate (NY: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1963), pp. 221-223; Austin J. Freeley, Argumentation and Debate (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publ. Co., 1971), pp. 54-55; Glen E. Mills, Reason in Controversy, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), pp. 101-102; Wayne N. Thompson, Modern Argumentation and Debate (NY: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 56-57.

- ³³Paul W. Taylor, Normative Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), pp. 299-300.
- ³⁴P. H. Nowell-Smith, Ethics (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), esp. chs. 5-6.
- ³⁵Wallace, "Topoi and the Problem of Invention," pp. 392-394. See also, Donald C. Bryant and Karl R. Wallace, Fundamentals of Public Speaking, 4th ed. (NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), pp. 36-39.
- ³⁶Joseph W. Wenzel and Dale J. Hample, "Categories and Dimensions of Value Propositions: Exploratory Studies," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 11 (Winter 1975), 121-130.
- ³⁷Toulmin, Reason in Ethics, ch. 11.
- ³⁸It is possible to develop the analysis of a given class of value propositions to an even greater degree of specificity. Consider, for example, the analysis of legal reasoning as a species of ethical discourse; Toulmin's analysis has been adapted to that purpose in Gidon Gottlieb, The Logic of Choice (NY: Macmillan, 1968).
- ³⁹Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric, p. 514.